

Valuing Diversity

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Valuing Diversity – An Operational Definition

Valuing diversity is probably most amply defined by the American Psychology Association (APA) in *The Valuing of Diversity Project* (October 31, 2002). The final report summarizes a three-year project that was supported by the APA and funded by a grant from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. Although designed to enhance the capacity of professional psychologists, the project is relevant to diversity in many other ways. The following definition and ways to strengthen diversity are taken from that project.

Valuing diversity is what institutions and members of communities do to acknowledge the benefits of their differences and similarities. They work to build sustainable relationships among people and institutions with diverse memberships.

A community that values diversity ensures that institutions provide equal treatment and access to resources and decisions for all community members regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and physical disability.

– American Psychological Association, 2002

In order to value diversity, a community must strengthen its ability to:

- Accept individual and group differences;
- Understand cultural differences in self-expression through verbal communication and body language;
- Continuously and effectively address racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of oppression;
- Develop and implement strategies that publicly recognize the cultural traditions and practices of every major group;
- Support processes that allow each group to address its own priorities while at the same time helping the different groups find common ground to address shared concerns;
- Understand the dynamics between a group's characteristics and issues related to power, privilege, and oppression and know how to integrate the knowledge into its valuing diversity strategies (American Psychological Association, PsyNet, 2003).



Valuing diversity is a critical competency for leaders in today's society. If it is not part of leaders' strategic skills, they may find themselves less effective managers. Unpleasant results and costs could come from discrimination suits, litigation time and money, legal fees or settlements, high employee turnover rates, and negative community and organizational images.

The question is how may one become competent in valuing diversity. A general answer may involve trust. That is to say, one must learn to trust himself or herself and to trust others, not in an intellectual sense, but through interaction with persons from different groups. Valuing diversity also involves building a capacity for trust within the environment of one's everyday interactions. Building the capacity for trust among cultural groups involves understanding the impact of culture on communication, on the assumptions one makes about character, and on learning. It also involves fostering a climate of acceptance in which everyone is valued and can make contributions. Each of these must be given attention and priority in a person's valuing diversity strategy. In addition, one must acknowledge that persons from many racial, gender, religious, and socioeconomic groups have contributed to the greatness of this society. Thus, being exposed to heroes and achievers from cultures other than one's own is strongly encouraged.

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Diverse Groups

Although we generally think of four or five groups when we discuss multiple cultures in our society (African American, Asian American, American Indian, Hispanic/Latino American), America is, in fact, a society of multiple cultures and cross-cultural influences. "... given the diversity of cultures that are found in this country alone, it seems more appropriate to emphasize the phenomenon of multiculturalism than to speculate about a single world culture" (Renzetti and Currin, 1998).

Multiculturalism is a more contemporary term or concept used to emphasize the fact that many groups have played significant roles in this country's cultural development and advancement. Moreover, the concept begs for the recognition of historical and contemporary contributions by diverse cultural groups in our society. They should be respected and appreciated for their cultural practices and experiences. Demographers clearly describe America as becoming more diverse. This phenomenon suggests that a multicultural perspective is even more necessary if America is to sustain its growth and positioning as a world leader. It can do that if all the various cultures come together in cooperation and respect. Their interdependency is critical given the rapid growth of the world business community, advances in mass communication and information technology, and developments in transportation. The world is much smaller and more connected than ever before. Many supporters of multiculturalism point to our nation's need to recognize diversity as a necessary part of our existence.

As one supporter said, "... *Kwanzaa is a reaffirmation of the United States' need to respect, celebrate and build on the rich resources of its diversity of people and cultures, to see itself as an ongoing multicultural project to create a truly just and good society; and to embrace an ethics of sharing – shared space, shared wealth, shared power and shared responsibility of all peoples – African, Native American, Latino, Asian and European – to conceive and build the world they want to live in.*"

– officialkwanzaawebsite.org

Another way of looking at groups in the United States is by racial and ethnic identity. The United States is a nation of diversity. In fact, given the diversity of cultures found in the United States, it is more appropriate to emphasize multiculturalism than to speculate about a single United States' or American culture. Furthermore, the most recent census clearly shows that the American population is experiencing tremendous ethnic and minority growth.

In 1945, the American population was 86 percent white, 3 percent Hispanic, 10 percent Black, and 1 percent Asian. In 1995, the white population was 75 percent and the Hispanic population was 10 percent. Census estimates for the United States' population in 2050 suggest the following representation:

- Whites – 53 percent
- Hispanics – 25 percent
- Blacks – 14 percent
- Asians – 8 percent
- American Indians – less than 1 percent

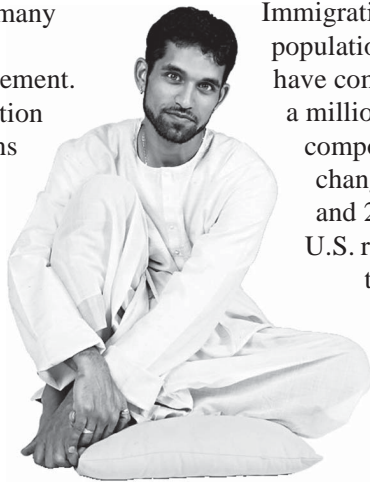
Immigration is a significant factor in the changing population. Since 1965, 20 million immigrants have come to the United States. Approximately a million have come each year since 1990. The composition of the foreign-born population is changing dramatically as well. Between 1970 and 2000 for example, the share of foreign-born U.S. residents from Europe dropped from 62 percent to 15 percent. Over the same period, the share of the foreign-born from Asia grew from 9 percent to 25 percent, and the share from Latin America increased from 19 percent to 51 percent. In 2000, two-thirds of foreign-born Latin Americans were from Central America (including Mexico).

Supporters of multiculturalism are strong proponents of national executive proclamations recognizing our nation's various cultural heritage groups. Such proclamations serve an invaluable role in efforts to forge together a life based on mutual respect and interdependence. Each cultural group benefits. However, the greatest beneficiary is our country and society.

Proclamations by a U.S. president recognize cultural groups' history and culture and calls on all Americans to learn more about the heritage of these groups. These actions have a reaffirming influence on the nation's appreciation and respect for the traditions and way of life of various cultural groups. They can help to preserve important parts of our American culture for future generations. The following ethnic heritage months have been proclaimed:

- Black History Month – February
- Irish American Heritage Month – March
- Asian/Pacific Heritage Month – May
- Hispanic Heritage Month – September
- Native American Heritage Month – November
- Italian American Heritage Month – October

In addition, Women's History Month is observed during March. Here, again, the focus is on learning the history of women and honoring the contributions women have made to our society. Check the Web (www.Diversitystore.com) for more information about each of these heritage celebrations.



Quotations on Diversity

“Tolerance implies a respect for another person, not because he is wrong or even because he is right, but because he is human.” – John Cogley Commonweal

“If we cannot now end our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity.”

– John Fitzgerald Kennedy (1917-63),
35th U.S. President

“Diversity: the art of thinking independently together.”

– Malcolm Stevenson Forbes (1880-1954),
American publisher and businessman

“I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.”

– Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-68),
African American pastor and
civil rights leader

“Our loyalties must transcend our race, our tribe, our class, and our nation: and this means we must develop a world perspective.”

– Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-68),
African American pastor and
civil rights leader

“There never were, in the world, two opinions alike, no more than two hairs, or two grains; the most universal quality is diversity.”

– Michel Eyquem de Montaigne (1533-92),
French essayist

“There is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged to find the ways in which you yourself have altered.”

– Nelson Mandela (b. 1918),
South African civil rights leader
and Nobel Peace Prize winner



“I am inferior of any whose rights I trample underfoot. Men are not superior by reason of accidents of race or color. They are superior who have the best heart – the best brain.”

– Robert Green Ingersoll (1833-99),
American politician and lecturer

“The most important single ingredient in the formula of success is knowing how to get along with people.”

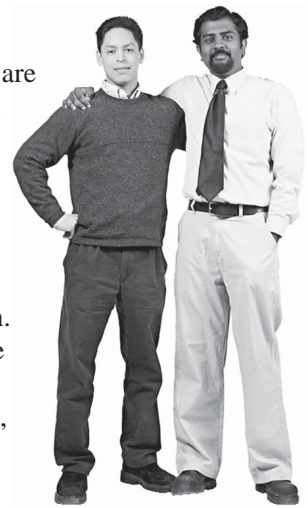
– Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919),
26th U.S. President, Republican

“Prejudice is the child of ignorance.” – William Hazlitt

“It’s amazing what ordinary people can do if they set out without preconceived notions.” – Wings of Wisdom

Exercises

1. Discuss reasons why there are classes of people protected by federal law and at West Virginia University.
2. In a group of four, contrast the social styles of persons living in poverty, in the middle class, and in wealth. What social differences are placed on money, time, clothing, humor, education, food, family structure, and driving force? (See Ruby Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*.) Also answer the question, “What accounts for the differences?”
3. In pairs, discuss the following questions:
 - a. When did you first know that there is a sexual orientation other than heterosexual?
 - b. When did you first hear about gay marriages? What are your thoughts about gay marriages?
4. In pairs, discuss the following questions:
 - a. When were you first aware of yourself as a member of a particular racial group?
 - b. Have you witnessed or experienced someone being treated differently because of his or her racial group? When?
 - c. When was a time that you were proud of your racial identity?
 - d. When was a time that you were not proud of your racial identity?
5. In pairs, discuss the following:
 - a. Have you noticed or experienced someone being treated differently because of his or her mental or physical disability?
 - b. What were the circumstances?



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Wood, J. (2001). *Gender Lives: Communication, Gender and Culture*. (4th Ed) San Francisco: Wadsworth Publishing.

Web Reading

Japanese Community Youth Council (www.jcyc.org)

National Center for Cultural Competence (www.georgetown.edu)

Surgeon General's Report (www.mentalhealth.org)

Values for a Better Life (www.forbetterlife.org/values/quotes.asp)

officialkwanzaawebsite.org/

Valuing Diversity PowerPoint Presentation (www.wvu.edu/~exten/infores/pubs/ceospub.htm)